

Mr. J. Edmeston for their exertions as honorary secretaries.

DISCUSSION ON POLYCHROMATIC EMBELLISHMENTS IN GREEK ARCHITECTURE.

A CONTINUATION of the discussion already partly reported took place at the meeting of the Institute of British Architects on the 9th instant.

Mr. Cockerell, V.P. who presided, said he had been requested to state the results of his investigations at Egina in the year 1811, which he had intended long ago to make public, and with that view had caused engravings to be made, two of which he exhibited to the meeting. It would be remembered that the temple of Egina was a work of the sixth century before Christ. It was of very small dimensions, and constructed of free-stone; being a specimen of that ancient Doric which was seen in the earliest examples. The columns and entablature were covered with a very fine coating of marble dust and pounded stalactite, as it seemed, having an effect of great brilliancy and lustre. There were no traces of colour on the columns or steps beneath them, and no part of the architrave was coloured except the tænia under the triglyphs, which was red. The triglyphs, and the background of the tympanum, were blue; the beak moulding, as it was called, had the well-known leaf ornament, and within the portico a fascia band of great lustre, having an enrichment highly archaic in character, coloured blue on a strong red ground, and in several parts exceedingly well preserved, was discovered over the frieze. This, which no doubt had an excellent effect in its position, on account of the great strength of the colour, was not at all correctly represented by M. Blouet's drawing, either as to the form or the colour of the ornament. The ancient temple of Corinth was also covered with a very fine stucco, one-eighth of an inch thick, which gave to the parts the appearance of the finest marble. The same fine varnish, as he might call it, was to be found in the temple of the Giants, and other buildings at Agrigentum in Sicily. The temple of the Giants was an ashlar temple; the columns were built round a core, and the joints concealed by the stucco, the stone itself being a tufo; even the colossal sculpture of that temple was also covered with stucco. He had found many fragments in other parts of Sicily, proving the same practice of covering the temples with stucco; and the Museum of Catania contained numerous evidences of the use of polychromy. Colour was also to be traced on many remains at Syracuse; all of these were early specimens, and furnished evidences of that archaic taste which always prevailed in countries remarkable for a high patriotic feeling. He thought the attachment to what he might call excessive colouring was only to be traced in works of that early and archaic taste; and he humbly conceived, that in the marble temples of Greece, such as the Parthenon and the Theseum, which were of a more recent date, painting was employed with very great reserve. There was, however, distinct evidence that the architects of the age of Pericles employed colour—particularly crimson—and gold; and the use of crimson paintings on ceilings was constantly mentioned in Scripture. The employment of colour in Greek architecture was no doubt a fashion which prevailed more at some periods than others. There was an antique and barbarous fashion of painting statues. Pausanias referred to certain terminal figures, statues of Bacchus and others, which were painted crimson. Probably, in more refined times, as under Pericles, these fashions were modified by a higher reasoning, and overruled by a consideration of principles which ought to be carefully regarded. The subject was important in a practical point of view, and a question arose in reference to the material itself. To attempt the application of polychromy to the exquisite marble of Pentelicus appeared, indeed, to paint the lily and to gild the rose. The excessive and painful whiteness of the new marble had been justly adverted to, but it should be remembered, that what had been well described as "Nature's Polychromy"

was sure to arrive in course of time. The chalky effect of new buildings was familiar to all architects; but he thought the Greeks, in such noble buildings as the Parthenon, relied upon the natural complexion given by time, and did not attempt to paint its beautiful surface. In considering the principles which governed the Greeks in the use of polychromy, he might observe that their temples were a kind of cabinet work. The temple of Egina was not more than 35 feet high, and the Parthenon only 60 feet: the Temple of the Giants, at Agrigentum,—an unprecedented instance of magnitude—was 120 feet high. In the beautiful climate of Greece, he thought a natural love for these small but exquisite temples, and the ease and pleasure with which they could be minutely examined, would induce the Greeks to paint and otherwise embellish them; just as, in England, the fittings in our apartments, as bookcases, and cabinet furniture, were richly decorated. Size was, therefore, an important consideration. He believed that the extensive introduction of painting in English churches and cathedrals arose from pedantry, and not from the natural feeling of this country and climate. He would suggest, in reference to the practical application of Polychromy, that it should be introduced with very great reserve in this grey climate, although it may have been happily and properly applied under a more brilliant sky.

Mr. Nelson (hon. sec.) said that in a recent restoration of the Parthenon, exhibited at Paris by M. Pacard, the walls of the cells had been coloured red, and the same was stated to have been the case at Egina.

The Chairman stated that he had found no traces of such colouring at Egina.

M. Servaas de Jong, architect, of Amsterdam, visitor, said he thought that the subject under consideration was a very dangerous caprice; and particularly so because it was brought forward and defended by a very skilful advocate. He did not believe that the colouring of buildings, termed polychromy, deserved so much consideration, especially in England. He thought that if colouring ever was in use among the Greeks for the external decoration of their pagan temples, it could only be considered as the expression of a frivolous and worldly, not to say physical, religion. Similar usage of colour had occurred in the interior of Roman Catholic cathedrals in the fifteenth century. But in the present day to cover the interior of an architectural work, civil or religious, with colours like the interior of a theatre, would be an imposition on the simple and modest character of the faith of the English, and an attack upon the fundamental law of architecture, that the eye rests with delight, without being dazzled, upon sublime and harmonious effects, which spring from the chiaroscuro of the profiles, and not from contrasted colouring. Polychromy in moderation was acceptable for the interior of buildings dedicated to pleasure and relaxation, as well as in private homes, being carried out on information existing long before the publication of this book; but it was not adapted to the interior of public edifices devoted to study and serious business.

Herr Licht, architect, of Berlin, visitor, explained his views as to the intention of the ancient Greeks in adopting polychromy, and the reasons for decorating with colours in modern architecture. He considered that the colours were intended for ornament; that they were indispensable by reason of the taste for colour existing among southern nations; and that they were designed for protecting the material. Colour, he said, was an effective, and therefore requisite instrument in the hand of the architect; but its intended effect could only be produced when the idea which the architect wished to express, was harmoniously and perspicuously carried out, when the colour completed the development of the idea itself. That the Greeks, whose architecture we admired as the perfection of art, even before we knew its connection with polychromy, employed the latter, was no subject for reproach, either to the artistic cultivation of the Greeks, or to our own admiration of the beauty of their structures. It must be remembered, that our impressions of Grecian edifices were either the offspring of the imagination alone, which pictured them as existing under our gloomy northern sky in all the dazzling whiteness of their magnificent material, or they had been acquired from actual examination of the mouldering ruins, yellow with the lapse of ages, under the clear and glorious sky of Greece; in either case, no inharmonious picture met the eye of cultivated taste. If we imagined, however, the temples displayed in the glittering and almost trans-

parent purity of their white material, under the lustre of a southern sun—the piercing glare of such an object would be not merely injurious, but destructive to the sight. A building of well-burnt bricks, of hewn stone, or covered with a weather-proof cement, did not need the further protection of colour; but the structure, which had lately developed itself in England, and announced a new era in architecture, the structure in iron, required such aid from the very nature of the material. A significant, eventful form of building, in which the spirit of our age was reflected in all its greatness.

Mr. Harding, visitor, thought that the employment of colour by ancient architects on their buildings, had been placed beyond dispute by the observations which had been made at the last meeting, and that the point which remained to be decided was, whether the architects of the present day should follow this example, entirely or partially, or reject it altogether. Professor Donaldson had said, that we should defer to the authority of the exalted genius, which had produced monuments that had been objects of admiration and text-books of study for ages; but Mr. Harding could not easily agree in this opinion, unless he could previously persuade himself, that because the Greeks were great as architects they were also great as colourists. With the architect as with the sculptor, form was the great field for the display of his powers, in which he was the acknowledged teacher, and the public were his pupils; but if he touched colour, he converted his pupils into disputants, and made those who would admire his forms entirely lose sight of them in the provoked discussion on his application of colour. He hoped he might be excused for this expression of his opinion, and for saying that he preferred to be guided to conclusions in theory, and results in practice, on this subject, by an older, more able, and answering teacher—Nature. Stone of any kind might be employed for the purposes of building, and, putting aside the cost of obtaining the different marbles, these presented tints of every variety, sufficient to satisfy abundantly the most craving appetite or the most fastidious taste for colour. Here we stood in no need of evanescent pigments to decorate and deaden, and leave futurity to discover, by toil and travail, whether the architects of to-day, who would be ancient masters to posterity, were polychromists as well as architects.

Mr. Owen Jones expressed his fear that anything he could say on this interesting subject would be very unsatisfactory. The question was not altogether one of taste, or whether the Polychromy of the Greeks was such as we should approve of; because we did not at present know enough about it to form an opinion on that point. Now, however, that the public attention was directed to the subject, it might be hoped that the same careful investigation would be bestowed upon the colouring of the Parthenon as Mr. Penrose had devoted to its form; and it would then be known whether the Greeks were as imperfect in their application of colour as Mr. Harding supposed. For himself he did not believe that would prove to be the case, or that a people so refined as they were could be so defective in their knowledge of a sister art. He could not, indeed, conceive it for an instant. There was already evidence which could not possibly be controverted that the Parthenon was partially coloured, and he considered that it might be assumed, in fact, that it was entirely coloured. He agreed with Mr. Donaldson in the opinion that the Parthenon was first covered with a thin coating of stucco. Of course this would appear very frightful to those who were accustomed to look upon the white marble of the Parthenon as such a wonderfully beautiful material. He denied that the Greeks so regarded it. The Parthenon was not complete in any way without its colour; nor were any of its mouldings perfect without their coloured ornaments. The question of introducing colour in this country was altogether a distinct one. He did not think the time had arrived for us to do so; indeed, we were not able yet to devise an architecture of our own. When we had made our own buildings, we might colour them according to our own modes of thought; but at present we transplanted a Greek temple into England; and, in his opinion, the colouring on it would be no more out of place than the building itself.

Mr. L'Anson, Fellow, stated that in the year 1836 he was at Athens, when the remains of the Temple of Victory without wings had just been discovered, and upon the fragments of it he observed distinct traces of painting, especially in the coffers under the pediment. As to the modern application of colour to external architecture, it was evident that the prevailing feeling had been against it. The effect of colour in the restoration of the Cathedral of Spire, now in progress, was highly imposing. In the cathedrals of Coblenz and Cologne, colour was also employed, but less successfully; and even the most ardent admirers of polychromy in Germany